

Interviewee: Erin Minks

Date: 03.02.2016

Location: Cooper Room, Alamosa, CO

Time: 3:30pm

Erin Minks works for the Forest Service. She previously was a staffer for Ken Salazar (2005-2009), John Salazar (2005-2011), and most recently, Mark Udall (2009-2015). Erin is trained as a lawyer and currently works in Monte Vista for the Forrester Service. She lives in Alamosa, Colorado with her husband and their young daughter.

To start off, can you please state your name and your current position?

Where are you from originally?

- When did you first come to Colorado?
- And when did you come to the Valley? What brought you here?

Can you tell us a little about your scholastic trajectory?

- Where did you study?
- What did you study?
- What motivated you to study these fields?

Did you ever practice law following law school?

- If so, did you take the Colorado bar?

What got you into local politics?

- Can you tell us a little about the life of congressional staffer?

Specific to your work in the valley, what were some of the inequalities you noticed in so much as access to resources are concerned?

Regarding the *Garcia v. Vilsack* case, can you tell us a little bit more about the role you played in the case?

- Did you work directly with claimants?
- Did claimants contact their representatives frequently?
- How response where local representatives to the issue?

Two of the representatives you worked for were Hispanic as well. Do you think this influenced the way they approached this particularly issue?

What was it like working in the community on this issue as an Anglo female?

- Did your gender ever create barriers for you?

Did you ever meet any indirect hostilities?

- That is, farmers had to go through you and so, when denied, they might have associate you and your staff with the outcome?
- On the other hand, the case revealed the White farming community in an unfavorable light. How did this influence the relationship of representatives with their White constituents?

Were most of the claims under the *Garcia v. Vilsack* case similar or were there large differences in the individual claimants?

Can you describe a typical case? That is, can you sketch out a case that comes to mind that really showcases the types of allegations that local farmers and ranchers were making?

Was it difficult to remain neutral or objective as you got to know each of these cases better?

Here in the valley were there any female farmers involved in the case?

Related to the former, we still live in a highly patriarchal society, especially in rural communities. Do you think that discrimination is different for female farmers?

Do you think growing up outside the valley gave you an independent view on the *Garcia v. Vilsack* case?

- If so, why?

What were Udhal's and the Salazar's initial responses to the claims?

Do think this was somewhat personal for the Salazars given their own heritage?

What were the challenges in the *Garcia* case to transitioning from one representative to the next?

95% of the applicants' claims were denied. And many were denied on accounts of fraudulent claims.

- What do you think accounts for such a high rejection rate?
- Related to this, what were the legal barriers to actually demonstrating discrimination for farmers and ranchers?

Do you think the eventual settlements made up for the losses suffered by farmers and ranchers over the years?

Why did you eventually get out of staffing or working for representatives?